MAORI PATTERNS

PAINTED AND CARVED

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Gift of Stephen W. Phillips
1927

MAORI CARVING, as practised among the Maoris long ago, was a sacred work, as well as the beautiful painted patterns. Every pattern had a name, and also a Karakia belonging to it, which had to be said while it was being carved or painted. No person was taught these Karakias necessary to the work, except a Rangatira. Therefore no carving could be done amongst the Maoris except by a man of good birth. If any mistake—gross wilful mistake—in the pattern was made, then the work became very unlucky, both to the carver and also to the person who at any time owned the work done. In fact, a Hara had been committed, and ill-luck would follow. It may be that the various patterns had once a meaning; I myself think that they had, but that the meaning was lost long ago, just as the meaning of most of the Karakias was probably lost long ago, too.

I believe that the art has steadily advanced ; for instance, it was at one time very shallow, and was composed of small triangular notches with lines drawn between them as seen in some of the oldest carving. Then the same patterns were produced more deeply, with straight lines as a ground pattern, instead of pricking, as done on other carving. Then the beautiful curved ground was introduced, turning itself round and round, the ends of the commas, if I may so call them, which compose nearly all the patterns. Then this was improved upon by making these circular ground patterns with three lines and beads between the three lines ; and then deep cutting was introduced to show up the pattern in places.

I wish, also, to point out that there is no trace of nature in Maori carving, it is entirely decorative—like Arab patterns. Then, as to the painted work, especially the many rafter patterns, for nearly all the painted work was done in the roof, inside the Maori houses. In the arrangement of the two colours used, viz.: red and black—the red being a very carefully prepared hematite sifted through leaves, and finely powdered charcoal—both were mixed with fish oil. The pattern in the first and earliest work was shown by a light-coloured wood, sometimes with a ground of red and black, so showing the pattern. Then as to the arrangement of these two colours, red and black. They, I think it is evident, were generally arranged so as to break the monotony of the pattern and a change was often introduced in each panel, or where the pattern repeated itself.

There were terminal patterns at the end of each rafter, at the bow of the canoes, and in other places.

The pattern was not, as a rule, made to fit into the space or rafter, but was cut anywhere, and a terminal pattern introduced to end the work.

I think that the carving of even small boxes and weapons was painted always, in the old days, and were not finished till so painted. The very old boxes in the British Museum are so painted, as well as carved.

Maori carving was done in the old days, especially the beautifully and finely carved weapons and boxes, by old men. They sat on a sand-hill, or in some sheltered place, with a small boy to watch for enemies, and carved ; they carried the work with them on a journey as well. Also there were guilds of carvers, who went from place to place, and charged a high price for their work, and when the work was finished, each man put his especial mark in one place in the house carved by them, with all the others so employed, in fact, their signatures.

Maori carving long ago was an exceedingly slow and carefully executed work, done without the aid of iron or steel tools ; it was done with shells and greenstone, and sometimes burned out, I think, as well.

Maori carving was very much admired by the Maoris themselves, and is still ; it was of considerable value, as well, amongst them. I think that at the present day many of the young Maoris dread doing Maori carving, not knowing the Karakias; they considered it rather a doubtful art, surrounded by a risk of possible ill-luck.

I have attempted to collect and perpetuate these beautiful patterns, painted and carved, though many of the patterns could be both painted and carved amongst the Maoris. In fact, I think originally the painting was not blocked in, but painted in red and black lines, like the ground pattern in the carving.

I have tried my best to very carefully reproduce these beautiful patterns. I have carved most of them in wood and stone myself, and have been more and more struck by the good taste and art shown in them. They belong only to New Zealand, are not found in the other islands inhabited by a people calling themselves Maoris in the Pacific.

I do not pretend that this is a complete collection. There are probably many more patterns, and it now remains for some Maori of good birth to improve upon what I have done ; also I do not think that Maori art is composed only of carving and painting. Most beautiful work was done by the Rangatira women, and such work often took years to finish, and was of even greater value than the carving done by the men, and I do hope that some Maori woman of good birth and wealth will publish a book of Maori mat patterns (there are Maori women of means and good birth who could do so) before these beautiful mat patterns are lost.

J. H. MENZIES.

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Translations of the Inscriptions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT is gratefully made of the kindness of Mr. Hamilton, Director of the Dominion Museum, Wellington, to whom application was made for an English version of the inscriptions, Writing to the printers, Messrs. Smith & Anthony, Ltd., Christchurch, Mr. Hamilton says: "The inscriptions as given by you were somewhat too difficult for me to attack by myself, so I took counsel with Hare Hongi (Mr. Stowell), who is an expert in these matters, and he has corrected the text and given a short explanation of them. . . . . What I have sent can be relied upon as giving an accurate translation of the sense of the words you send."

Inscriptions on Maori Carvings, corrected and explained by Hare Hongi.

PLATE 1. E rua tau ruru, e rua tau wehe ;
E rua tau mutu, e rua tau kai :

Or, Two years of insect plague, two years bad weather for crops ; two years of penitence, two years of abundance.

PLATE 3. Ka riri Tai-ha, ka kata a Maero :

Or, He puts forth his great strength in vain, and angers ; whereupon the weak ones laugh amusedly.

PLATE 8. Kia maranga ake aku kamo, ko te whaturei a Rua :

Or, So that when I awake, mine eyes may rest upon the jewel-treasure of Rua. [For instance, a Pounamu, Hei-tiki, or piece of rich carving.]

PLATE 9. Koanga, tangata-tahi ; Ngahuru, puta noa :

Or, Digging-time, a single attendant [that is helper] ; Harvest-time, one is surrounded [by friends and attendants].

PLATE 13. Kainga te tahua a Rongo raua ko Haumia :

Or, Eat of that which the good gods provide so liberally.

PLATE 17. He kokonga Whare, e kitea ; he kokonga ngakau, e kore e kitea :

Or, The corners of a house are visible ; the corners of the heart are invisible;

Tangaroa, piri Whare : said of an eavesdropper.

PLATE 20. He ta kakaho, e kitea ; he ta ngakau, e kore e kitea :

Or, Intricacies in reed-work are discernible ; intricacies of the heart are indiscernible.

PLATE 21. Ma te kanohi Miromiro :

Lit. For the small-eyed pied-Tit : *Conveys the idea*, Such fine work requires a magnifying glass.

PLATE 22. Ko te tokanga nui a Noho :

Or, Whilst man sits an idle spectator, the food is growing around him in abundance. [No doubt this is so in the Central Pacific Islands.]

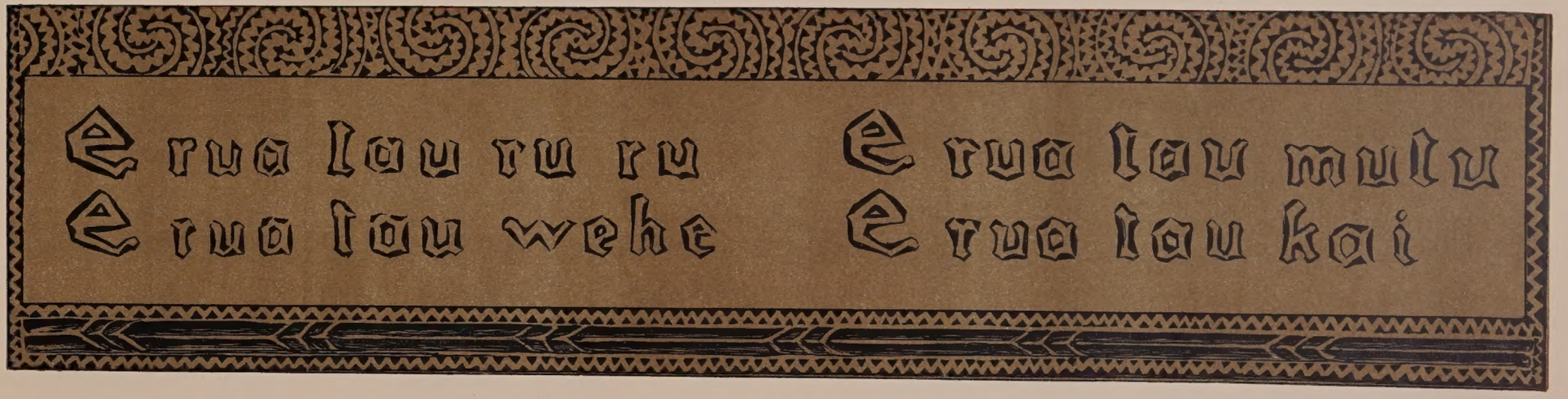
Haere mai e te manuwhiri, and so on : a royal welcome.

PLATE 24. Ka hoki ranei te Weka i motu i te mahanga ?

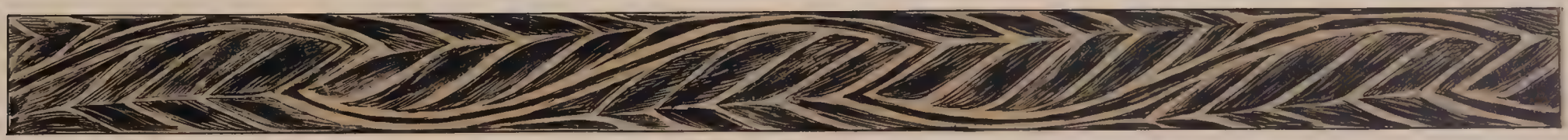
Or, Will the escaped Weka (think you) return to the snare ?

Tama tu, tama ora ; tama noho, tama mate :

Or, The industrious thrive while the idle die in want.


E rua lau ru ru
E rua lau mulu
E rua lau wehe
E rua lau kai

Ka kata maer ka riri taiha



Kia.maranga.ake.akakama
Ko te whatatarei.a.rua

He kooanga . tangata . tahi he
noahoru totanoa

Kainga.te.tahua.a.rongo
ranako haumia

Ne hokonga whare e kitea
Tangaroa hiri whare

Ha. te waewae i kimi

he.takakaho. ka.kitea tena.he.ta.no.te
ngakau e kore.e kitea

Ma te kanohi miro miro

Ko te tokanga nui a noho

Haere mai e te manuhiri

Ka hoko.ranei te.weka.i.motu.ki.te mahanga

Tama.tu.tama.ora.tama noho.tama maero

Ko te Toranga nui a Noho

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